relatively minor quibble. Longerich's book is a stimulating reflection on the interaction of structure and agency, the best synoptic account of the SS available, and richly deserving of the wide readership it will undoubtedly secure.

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A Most Dangerous Book: Tacitus' 'Germania' from the Roman Empire to the Third Reich. **By Christopher B. Krebs. New York: W.W. Norton and Company. 2011. 303 pp. £25.95 (hardback)/16.95 (paperback).**

It is a rare experience for historians to shock other people simply by doing their work. I was on an aeroplane holding a book in my hands, when an elderly English lady on my left asked me with unveiled suspicion and in a rather loud voice, 'What on earth are you reading?' In my puzzlement, I showed her the cover, and then I realized. There was a red Swastika on the front, and it was next to the title 'A Most Dangerous Book'. It took me quite a while to convince the lady that the title referred to another book and that I was not a closet Nazi. In the end, she even seemed to believe me that, for an academic book at least, it was not a boring read at all.

A Most Dangerous Book deals with a short and sober ethnographic description written almost two thousand years ago by the Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus. The *Germania*, as it became to be known in modern times, did not seem dangerous to anybody for centuries, and neither does it today. Yet, Nazis in general and Himmler in particular liked it a lot, and this is what earned it a place in an (imaginary) top-hundred list of 'most dangerous books ever written', established by the Italian historian Arnaldo Momigliano in the 1950s. The German classicist and author of *A Most Dangerous Book*, Christopher Krebs, begins his story with an SS detachment on the Italian Adriatic Coast failing to chase down the oldest surviving manuscript copy dating from the early Renaissance, before being themselves chased over the Alps by the Allies in the autumn of 1943.

By then, the booklet had supposedly done its damage—infecting the Germans on an epidemic scale. Krebs, in a key paragraph to his introduction, turns to Richard Dawkins' 1993 article *Viruses of the Mind* and its diagnosis of how the Bible affects the brains of 'faith-sufferers'. 'Ideas resemble viruses', Krebs postulates,

> they depend on minds as their hosts, they replicate and mutate in content or form, and they gang up together to form ideologies. They spread vertically through generations as well as horizontally from one social group to another. The *Germania* virus, imported in the late fifteenth century from Italy, exhibited various local symptoms in historical texts, linguistic treatises, political and cultural philosophy, law, racial theories, and even school texts, all of which were indicative of a serious disease. Then—after 350 years of incubation—during the latter part of the nineteenth century, it progressed to a systemic infection culminating in the major crisis of the twentieth century. (p. 23)

The book sets out to tell the story of this long incubation, but fortunately it does not stick to the pathological imagery for long. Apart from the beginning, Krebs avoids a simple teleological narrative focusing on the 'Nazi interpretation' of the *Germania* as the fulfilment of a dark destiny looming from the moment the text was written. Instead he presents a rich account of the crooked ways in which the booklet was discovered by Italian humanists in the fifteenth century and then interpreted and reinterpreted without end according to the changing interests and ideologies of its readers. Concentrating on the reception history within Germany, Krebs offers ample evidence for the extraordinary variety of readings, which were enabled by Tacitus' ambivalent judgements on the *Germani*. His concept of German 'liberty' (*libertas Germanorum*), for instance, could be alternately associated with military power (Chap. 37), self-determination (Chap. 2), permanent belligerence (Chap. 14), indiscipline and

inefficiency (Chap. 11), self-endangering recklessness (Chap. 24), barbarian irrationality or genuine sincerity (Chap. 22). It does not come as a surprise, therefore, that the small work inspired authors as diverse as Enea Silvio Piccolomini and Ulrich von Hutten, Montesquieu and Fichte.

Krebs' book is based on an extensive study of both well-known and little-known texts covering the whole period from the mid-fifteenth to the mid-twentieth century; thanks to his careful selection of quotes and his informative comments on literary and political contexts he offers a useful introduction not only to the modern reception of Tacitus, but also to the long history of German nationalism in general. Furthermore, a good dose of humour makes for an entertaining read, even when the subject matter is gruesome. After describing Himmler's ideal of the blond-haired, blue-eyed 'Nordic' muscleman, Krebs quotes a Nazi provincial governor to indicate that one cannot accuse the *Reichsführer* SS of flattering himself: 'If I looked like Himmler', the governor said, 'I wouldn't even mention the word race' (p. 237).

On the whole, this is an intelligently crafted and elegantly written book, except for the title and its underlying thesis about the viral quality of ideas—and not just because it can make for uncomfortable reading in public. After all we know it is hard to see why the *Germania* should have been a disaster waiting to happen. The alleged virus planted in the booklet is, of course, Tacitus' assumption that the *Germani* were an indigenous people 'nowise mixed with different peoples' (Chap. 2). German Renaissance humanists had already used this passage to create, with Italian help, a nationalist narrative of pure blood, authentic culture and free soil, and yet this was, as Krebs emphasizes himself, still a far cry from the racist killing dreams of the Nazis, let alone preparing the ground for the Holocaust. In fact, the extermination of a whole people for racist reasons remained hardly conceivable until the arrival of the social Darwinist belief in the 'survival of the fittest', and even then, the path from imagination to execution was not predestined at all.

So, should we, in fact, declare *The Origins of Species* a most dangerous book? An indirect answer is given in the last sentence of Krebs' book: 'Tacitus did not write a most dangerous book; his readers made it so' (p. 313). This comes as a surprise after the viral analogy at the outset of the book, but it fits the story told by the author much better, and it may generally be a more promising, if not revolutionary approach to the reception history of literary works. Richard Dawkins, after all, may be a good adviser on how to do battle on television, but less so on how to understand the fate of publications.

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***Uprooted: How Breslau Became Wrocław During the Century of Expulsions*. By Gregor Thum. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2011. xi + 508 pp. £24.95 (paperback).**

Following a ferocious three-month siege by the Soviet Army that began in February 1945, the centuries-old German city of Breslau, which Hitler had designated a *Festung* to be defended to the last man several months earlier, lay in ruins. Subsequently, rapacious pillaging and multifarious criminal activity by many Soviet troops exacerbated this catastrophic situation. Under the terms of the Potsdam Conference in August that year, the city, together with large segments of Germany's eastern provinces, including Silesia and parts of Pomerania, Brandenburg and East Prussia, was officially given over to Polish ownership and renamed Wrocław. Within a few years, virtually all of the city's one-time German population of some 600,000 had been expelled and replaced overwhelmingly by Poles from central Poland and the Polish lands in the East (*Kresy*) annexed by the Soviet Union under the Yalta Accords (February 1945). In 1939, the number of Poles resident in Breslau had been exiguous. A further irony is that prior to its assumption of power in Germany in 1933, the Nazi Party had attained in successive Reichstag elections in 1930–1933 a level of support in the city (*Wahlkreis* 7)